THE NEW AZTECS: RITUAL AND RESTRAINT IN CONTEMPORARY WESTERN MILITARY OPERATIONS

Zhivan Alach

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THE NEW AZTECS: RITUAL AND RESTRAINT IN CONTEMPORARY WESTERN MILITARY OPERATIONS

Zhivan Alach

July 2011

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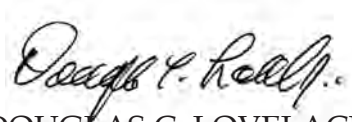
FOREWORD

The idea that the military environment is constantly evolving, becoming more and more dangerous and technologically sophisticated, is a common one. In the past century, we have seen the emergence of total war, nuclear weapons, and bloody unconventional and asymmetric campaigns. We have used many of the offshoots of this evolutionary idea to guide our own setting of defense policy, seeing in the evolution a constant escalation, albeit one perhaps marred by occasional yet small oscillations.

In an earlier monograph, *Slowing Military Change*, Dr. Zhivan Alach questioned whether or not we are indeed in an era of rapidly evolving military technology. In this monograph, he takes an even longer view, examining the scope of military history from the ancient to the present day and comparing the characteristics of the various eras within the situation today. He argues that, for the most part, there has been a steady escalation from primitive, indirect, low-casualty conflict to the massive total wars of the 20th century. However, from that time the momentum has changed.

Instead of a new era of war, Dr. Alach argues that we have returned to something akin to primitive warfare, with ritual and restraint now as important as what might be seen as objective standards of military success. He argues that Western popular culture, the news media, and democracy have all prevented militaries from fighting in an unrestrained manner. Another factor for such restraint has been a decline in the perceived utility of war in the absence of credible threats.

The monograph raises some interesting questions. What are the implications of this return to ritual and restraint? Has the West blinded itself to the realities of war? What if some foe emerges that is not restrained by such niceties of civilization? In the setting of strategic policy, all of these questions need to be answered, and the true value of this monograph is in bringing them to light.



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ZHIVAN ALACH is currently employed by a New Zealand security agency. Previously, he was an analyst for the New Zealand Defence Force. A longer version of this monograph was published in *Defence Studies,* Vol.10, Issues 1 and 2, March 2010. Dr. Alach holds a Ph.D. in defence policy from the University of Auckland.

SUMMARY

Centuries ago, the Aztecs of Central America fought their wars in a ritualized and restrained manner, not seeking total victory but rather the capture of live prisoners. It was a style of warfare that seems strange to us today, who have been brought up on Clausewitzian concepts of the meaning of war. We think of ourselves as scientific, instrumentalist practitioners of the art of war, seeking maximum military effectiveness.

The key argument of this monograph is that the Western way of war has actually come full circle and returned to its primitive roots. The monograph begins by identifying the primary factors that shape war. It then studies the evolution of warfare over time, beginning with what is known as primitive warfare. War began as glorified hunting, an extension of martial culture, heavily circumscribed by both ritual and restraint. The monograph then examines the major historical eras of warfare. While there was no steady evolution in a single direction, by and large, warfare became less and less subject to cultural restraint, and more and more total.

The monograph then briefly examines a range of recent Western operations that show a clear move away from total war and back toward ritual and restraint. Our most recent wars are driven far more by cultural beliefs and moral standards, including respect for international law, than they are by considerations of raw military effectiveness. A secondary argument, linked intimately to the first, is that we in the West, especially the media, do not seem to realize that we are limiting our arms to such an extent. We continue to see contemporary warfare as brutal and extremely deadly.

The monograph then posits a series of interlinked factors contributing to this reemergent ritual and restraint. The main factors are a decline in the perceived utility of war, sociocultural attitudes in the West, the impact of democracy, and the professionalism of contemporary soldiers. Finally, the monograph looks at the implications of this return to ritual and restraint. Are the "new Aztecs" in danger of appeasing the "sun god," but ignoring the conquistadors at the gates?

THE NEW AZTECS: RITUAL AND RESTRAINT IN CONTEMPORARY WESTERN MILITARY OPERATIONS

> So adamantly can a society, or part of it, desire to force warfare into accepted patterns that the society may replace real war with a Perfected Reality that more completely conforms to the relevant Discourse on War.
>
> —John A. Lynn.[1]

Roughly half a millennium ago, the Aztecs of Central America fought a series of what were known as Flower Wars. At various times, depending on the harvest,[2] which limited the windows of opportunity, Aztec armies would be sent forth.

The Aztecs' purpose, however, was not the conquest of their enemy, the expansion of Aztec territory, or some other goal we might term policy today; rather, it was the taking of captives for religious rituals. Restraint was key; killing a foe in battle was of little use. Thus their weapons were designed to cripple, not kill,[3] and in battle, Aztec warriors would deliberately avoid lethal blows, thus putting themselves in danger when fighting enemies whose lives would later be forfeit and who fought to kill. Furthermore, the Aztecs, though they had large armies, fought as individuals. The captives would be brought back to the great city of Tenochtitlan, where they would be sacrificed to one of several Aztec gods, usually through the ripping of the captive's still-beating hearts from their chests. Nor was nonlethality limited to native wars, for even when the Aztecs fought the Spanish conquistador, Hernando Cortes, they continued to fight for captives rather than simple victory.

For us in the West today, these Flower Wars may seem absurd. War is far too serious for us to limit it through rituals and risk death by deliberately restraining our own weaponry. Surely, the West fights logically and rationally,[4] identifying its goals and then applying the forces required to achieve them. Our way of war is perceived as being dominated by Karl von Clausewitz, whose dictums lead so easily to a demand for total war.[5]

And yet, closer examination of the evidence suggests that the contemporary Western practice of warfare is far closer in nature to that of the Aztecs 500 years ago, than it is to that utilized by the West itself in the World Wars.[6] We are the new Aztecs. We too are fighting for abstract spiritual concepts. Although ours are the product of reasoned discourse and a lengthy philosophical tradition, they are abstract spiritual concepts nonetheless. We do not have the sinister Tlacaxipeualiztli—Our Lord, the Flayed One—but rather the concepts of "humanitarianism" and "pacifism." Our priests are lawyers and United Nations (UN) officials, and our goal the sanctity of life, not military victory.

The key argument of this monograph is that the Western way of war has come full circle and returned in a sense to its primitive roots, of which the Aztecs present a colorful but not unique example. Their way of war began as glorified hunting, an extension of martial culture, heavily circumscribed by both ritual and restraint. Over time, war shed its ritualistic legacy. While there was no steady evolution in a single direction,[7] by and large warfare became less and less restrained by cultural suasion, and more and more total. Some have argued recently that instrumentality has triumphed, and that war will not allow "culturally driven but militarily ineffective ideas and practices

to prosper."[8] Yet our most recent wars are driven far more by cultural beliefs and moral standards, including respect for international law, than they are by considerations of raw military effectiveness. A secondary argument, linked intimately to the first, is that we in the West, especially the news media, do not seem to realize that we are limiting our arms to such an extent. We continue to see contemporary warfare as brutal and extremely deadly.

This monograph first identifies the primary factors that shape war. It then looks at the evolution of warfare over time, beginning with what is known as primitive warfare, identifying the key themes of that phenomenon, then analyzing some of the major eras of warfare. This historical summary shows clearly that the practice of warfare became increasingly total and instrumental. The monograph then briefly examines a range of recent Western military operations that show a clear move away from total war and back toward ritual and restraint.

The monograph then posits a series of interlinked factors contributing to this reemergent ritual and restraint. The main factors are a decline in the perceived utility of war, sociocultural attitudes in the West, the impact of democracy, and the professionalism of contemporary soldiers. Finally, the monograph looks at the implications of this return to ritual and restraint. Are the "new Aztecs" in danger of appeasing the "sun god," but ignoring the conquistadors at the gates?

Claiming that modern warfare resembles primitive warfare in its emphasis on ritual and restraint is a controversial thesis. It flies in the face of many who try to present contemporary warfare as intense, brutal, and dangerous,[9] fought against a foe who seeks nothing less than the destruction of Western civiliza-

tion and who may soon have the means to do exactly that. It also implies that the Hansonesque concept of a decisive, amoral, annihilatory "Western way of war" is at least for now inaccurate.[10] Finally, it should be emphasized that identifying a trend does not imply a normative judgment about that trend. It is not the author's goal to criticize or praise resurgent ritual and restraint, but rather to make its existence clear.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF WARFARE

War is not a biological necessity.[11] While the instinct of pugnacity appears to be an essential aspect of human nature,[12] pugnacity is not the same as warfare. Warfare is organized behavior that requires deliberation, control, and purpose, although it should be remembered that control is not synonymous with restraint.[13] As stated clearly by William Graham Sumner, "War arises from the competition of life, not from the struggle for existence."[14]

As with all organized activity, warfare is facilitated by a concept. A society must know how it wants to fight. It is this ideal concept that is the starting point for what occurs on the battlefield.[15] Styles of warfare reflect the self-conceptions, character traits, and modes of dealing with internal conflicts of the societies that go to war.[16] They are not fixed, however.[17] There is a constant evolving interaction between how a society wishes to fight, and how it can fight, given at least some degree of the instinct of self-preservation.

Some commentators have identified a trialogue determining the conduct of warfare:

1. What technology permits;
2. What politics requires; and,
3. What society allows.[18]

To this should be added the culture of the warmaking body, although some might suggest this is merely a sub-element of society.[19] Bernard Brodie has noted that nations at war, which are the key actors for much of this monograph's analysis, reflect a strong cultural element in their behavior.[20]

There is no historical record of primitive warfare in the West; our evidence begins with the Greeks. It can be plausibly hypothesized, however, that the warfare of the West's forgotten past resembled much of what passes for warfare in today's primitive tribal world. Because of this, the study of primitive warfare has largely fallen to anthropologists and sociologists,[21] rather than military historians.[22]

Space does not allow for a closer examination of the styles of war of multiple primitive peoples, but those of the Nguni,[23] Yanomamo,[24] Maring,[25] Iban,[26] Maori[27]—and, of course, Aztecs, as already noted—are greatly indicative. Some generalizations—themes that will later be shown to have overleaped the long intervening centuries to reemerge today—can be extracted from these examples.

The first important theme is that primitive societies existed largely in a state of perpetual warfare.[28] Partly because of this, primitive warfare was neither rational nor instrumental.[29] Warfare for primitive warriors was as much an expression of personal identity as anything else. There was a focus on individualism, on reputation and honor, and warfare was felt to define warriors in a way that does not necessarily apply to modern soldiers.[30]

Another important element was the heavily ritualized nature of primitive warfare, which in many cases resembled an extremely bloody game.[31] Cultural con-

trols were key to this restraint.[32] Much primitive warfare had a three-stage structure, exemplified by the Maring and Yanomamo, which escalated from feuding to raiding and thence to formal battle. The last was the least common, and primitive warriors seldom, if ever, aspired to the annihilation of their enemies. Close combat was usually avoided; instead, treachery and hit-and-run attacks were favored due to their low level of risk.[33] Armies fought with little coordination, and battle was usually more a series of individual duels than a collective activity.[34]

Restraint usually extended to the treatment of noncombatants, although this did vary, with some tribes treating them more brutally than others.[35] Usually, women, children, and the elderly were exempt from violence;[36] when violence against them did occur, it was usually an intertribal war rather than intratribal.

Further restraints focused on the justification for war; there was usually a careful consideration of the rationale for any war, and whether that rationale meshed with cultural beliefs. Often, conciliation and arbitration processes occurred simultaneously with the battle, sometimes on the battlefield itself. A final theme of primitive warfare involved conventions limiting the time and place. Events such as harvests usually defined the window for warfare, and the presence of sacred places limited potential battlefields, as did physical geography.

Overall, while primitive warfare was endemic, it was heavily restricted. Since then—that is, during the period of recorded history—Western warfare has passed through at least three main phases: the Warrior Period; the Grotian Period; and the Total War Period.[37] While they are approximations and full of anomalies, these three phases do provide a useful

construct for exploring the evolutionary distancing of Western warfare from its primitive roots.

The Warrior Period.

It was the Greeks, from approximately 500 BC onward, who first developed what became known as the "Western way of war,"[38] cutting loose from at least some of the constraints of primitive warfare.[39] Greek warfare was waged largely between Greek city-states, small independent actors in a land whose geography favored such a patchwork political structure. Battles were usually fought in the summer, when men could leave their farms and when the ground was firm enough for battle. Greek warfare was focused on decisiveness, since a quick resolution of any battle would enable the soldier-farmers to return swiftly to their work in the fields. Yet battles seldom ended in annihilation, and there was usually no real effort to follow up success on the battlefield with a pursuit. Ritual acts, especially the raising of a trophy on the battlefield, demonstrated victory. Alexander the Great carried the Greek style further,[40] stripping away some of the restraints of time and place,[41] even annihilating his enemies at times,[42] yet he was still a recognizably primitive warrior, dominated by superstition and ritual.

The Romans came next. They present the first major anomaly in the development of the Western way of war, for they were more ruthless and total in their methods than any society for almost 2,000 years.[43] They razed Carthage to the ground and salted its lands, and brought fire and the sword to much of Europe. Yet they were still heavily restricted by cultural beliefs, such as the reading of auguries, the need for a time for

commanders to be appointed for political purposes, and even the loyalty of their soldiers to their commanders, rather than to the state itself.

With the arrival of the Middle Ages came some return to ritual and restraint. The church was at the heart of efforts to restrain warfare in Europe,[44] promulgating strict regulations known as *jus militaire*, which, although motivated by theology, bore a strong resemblance to contemporary humanitarian law.[45] Combat often took on a judicial air, being seen as a means to resolve conflict through the supposed intervention of God's will.[46] Yet this peaceful message was not always respected, with mounted raids known as *chevauchees* bringing terror and death to noncombatants in the pursuit of political gains.[47] Medieval warfare was, however, further limited by the usual absence of large battles, with warfare devolving into a series of raids and sieges.[48]

The Grotian Period.

The Grotian period, so-called from the writings of the Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius on just war theory, especially from approximately 1631, was dominated by battles. It has been known as the "Age of Battles," but with ritualized tactics and efforts to establish restraining rules for the damage inflicted by war. There was an ongoing quest for decisiveness, and yet, if anything, warfare became less so.[49]

Ritualized tactics, wherein sides would approach each other to point-blank range and then exchange volleys of musket and cannon fire, resulted in extremely bloody battles, with sides sustaining 30-percent casualties at times.[50] Battles were dominated by a culture of honor and decorum that demanded "baring the

breast" to the enemy, exemplified best at Fontenoy, Belgium.[51] There was also a military rationale in exploiting the effectiveness of massed musket volleys, the tactics followed were seldom altered, indicating how ritualized they had become.

Yet, even as battles grew bloodier, there were efforts in the legal and political fields to restrict the effects of warfare on society as a whole.[52] It was during the Grotian period that the first legal conventions on restraint in warfare appeared in Europe.[53] Key to these conventions was an attempt to protect civilians, an attempt that proved largely successful. The 17th century was—in the words of one authoritative historian—"marked by virtually no departures in Europe . . . from the principle of noncombatant immunity."[54] Sacking a town, which was usually regarded as standard practice previously, now became abhorrent.[55]

At the end of the 18th century, the French Revolution altered the face of warfare, introducing new motivations of spirit, will, and nationalism. Building from these new motives, the French reintroduced some of the strategies of annihilation favored by the Romans almost 2,000 years before.[56] While technology was largely unchanged, nationalism made massive armies possible, which in turn made an increasingly total style of war possible.

Once Napoleon had been defeated, much of the remainder of the 19th century was marked by attempts to reimpose restraints upon warfare. In the second half of the century, the convergence of international humanitarian opinion, international law, and military modernization resulted in further formalization of the rules of war established by Grotius, expressed in a range of new international conventions.[57] Special care was taken to forbid certain types of weapons and ensure the protection of civilians.

It should be emphasized that the restraint spoken of during this period was largely limited to European wars. As in previous periods, the civilized norms of European conflict were seldom reflected in more distant realms, where brutality was commonplace.[58] And in America in the middle of the 19th century, there were signs that the more total aspects of the Western way of war had become firmly implanted, with the ruthless American Civil War indicating, potentially, a new development in warfare as important as the French Revolution.

THE AGE OF TOTAL WAR

The largely bloodless wars of the late 19th century led to a new era of war in the 20th: the Age of Total War.[59] Warfare, motivated by mass spirit and will, motivations that had first emerged in the French Revolution, became increasingly divorced from the vestiges of judicial and ritualistic elements.[60] Picking selectively from Clausewitz, commentators declared that only total war could be successful, and that only a foolish country would wage restrained war.[61]

The first of these total wars, World War I, was distinctly un-Clausewitzian in one important regard, however. It illustrated an astonishing mismatch between political purpose and military design.[62] The sides went to war with seemingly clear aims, with their peoples clamoring for war, blood, and redress.[63] However, military technology resulted in stalemate, and, as time went on, the gap between political goals and military strategy grew wider and wider.

World War I was a brutal war. The dictum of the trenches involved thousands of infantry troops charging across No-Man's Land to be cut down by machine

guns and artillery. The strategy of attritional warfare largely followed by all sides, with some late exceptions, demanded sending more and more young men to die in an effort to destroy the reserves of the enemy. World War I saw war become its own *raison d'etre*. Entire economies were mobilized to produce weapons, and troops were raised from across the globe.

World War I was perceived, at first, to have been the last of its kind, the "war to end all wars." Moves were soon underway to outlaw war entirely, and to further limit it in any event.[64] This was not the first time that a war had been followed by a pacifist counterreaction.

These attempts failed. World War I was followed by an even more total war, World War II, a war that made all the wars that had gone before it seem like the mere exchange of arrows in a Yanomamo "nothing fight." World War II was a global war. It was a war of ideology: Fascism and Nazism against Democracy and Socialism. It was a battle of industry: the Urals and Detroit against the Ruhr. It was a battle fought, especially on the Russian and Pacific Fronts, with little restraint.[65] In the few instances in which sides constrained their methods, as with chemical weapons, such restraint was motivated by fear of retaliation rather than humanitarianism.

The Nazis sought to conquer Eurasia, to exterminate entire populations, and to enslave much of the rest. The Japanese pursued similar goals in the Pacific. The Allies, though less extreme, still demanded the total surrender of both Nazi Germany and Japan. Some policymakers even suggested decimating the more "militaristic" elements of Germany, destroying its industry, and turning it into a pastoral idyll.

The war in Europe ended with Germany's unconditional surrender and occupation. In the Pacific, the war ended with the dropping of the first atomic bombs on Japan. Thus, by 1945, history showed a very clear trend toward unrestrained and total war, a trend made all the more terrifying by the presence of nuclear weapons. As a response to this, there were again further moves to outlaw or restrict war, largely through the formation of the UN.[66]

There was a third total war in the 20th century, albeit one that never erupted: the Cold War.[67] Had this become hot, it would have pitted the Soviet Union against the United States, each armed with an arsenal of nuclear weapons. It is probable that Clausewitz's dictums would have reached their ultimate extension here, helping justify a global nuclear exchange that would have killed billions. Luckily, this Third World War did not erupt; instead, Western states fought only a few expeditionary wars during the period.[68]

Throughout the periods examined above, a discernible Western way of war has emerged, a way of war that has grown more distinctive as it has developed.[69] It is a lethally amoral tradition, and over time it has become less shackled by religion, ritual, tradition, or ethical standards.[70] Western armies have pursued the annihilation of their enemies, rather than social recognition, religious salvation, or personal status.[71] The social ramifications of technology, which constrained the development of effective armies in countries such as Japan and Turkey, have been regarded as less important than military efficacy.[72]

This is not to say that the West has always fought fully in such a way. Many of these tendencies grew stronger over time, as war grew more total, amoral, and unrestrained, although there were substantial his-

torical oscillations.[73] The total war impulse seemingly reached its culmination in 1945. Since that critical inflection point, there has been a shift back toward ritual and restraint. This new trend is marked by a growing intolerance for casualties, both friendly and enemy, both soldier and civilian, and an emphasis on limited means of war.[74]

RECENT AND CONTEMPORARY RITUAL AND RESTRAINT IN WARFARE

The following case studies illuminate the ritualistic and restrained elements present in several recent and contemporary conflicts involving the West. The case studies focus on the character of, rather than the rationale behind, that restraint. Later in the monograph, more detailed analysis of the reasons behind the return of restraint is given. It should also be noted that although ritual and restraint are usually linked, this is not always the case. Again, there is no intent to render value judgments about the return of primitive warfare traits in recent conflicts.

Apart from Somalia and the enforcement period that preceded the ground phase in Kosovo, this monograph does not examine peace-support operations, because such operations, by definition, are deliberately restrained and ritualized. Analyzing them, especially given their greatly increased frequency in the post-Cold War period, would only strengthen the thesis that the West is once again fighting in a highly constrained fashion.

Vietnam.

Vietnam presents an excellent example for study, for it was a "halfway house," the first clear sign following World War II[75] of nonmilitary considerations restraining the conduct of war in a way that was greatly harmful to military efficacy.[76] While to the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong the war was a total war, demanding the full utilization of national resources, the Americans perceived it in a more limited fashion.[77] As a result, the American military, used to having a largely free hand in military operations,[78] found itself heavily restrained.[79] Its methods illustrated many of the trends characteristic of primitive war.

America did not pursue annihilation, refusing to employ substantial parts of its arsenal, including nuclear weapons, or even sustained strategic bombing of urban areas.[80] It restricted the place of war, allowing large parts of the war zone to serve as sanctuaries[81] where American ground troops were never sent, and where air strikes were seldom undertaken.[82] Strict requirements were imposed on air combat aircraft to visually identify their potential targets, thus rendering their long-range missiles largely useless. At other times, micromanagement extended to battalion commanders in the jungle, who receive instructions directly from the President.[83] Bombing halts were linked to arbitration processes, a high-technological version of village elders standing on the Maring battlefield.

Although American soldiers were conscripted, an element common to total war, they served only 1-year tours of duty. In theater, they were often able to access luxury goods unimaginable to soldiers in previous conflicts. Indeed, for many of the personnel at the larger bases, life in Vietnam was decidedly unwarlike.

The peacelike atmosphere was further intensified by the omnipresence of the news media. Casualty rates were also lower than those experienced in previous wars, such as the World Wars and American Civil War, with just over 57,000 dying in well over half a decade of ground operations.

Yet at the same time, Vietnam still showed enduring elements of the Western way of war. Carpet bombing against area targets was undertaken, and there was wholesale defoliation of swaths of jungle in an effort to deny enemies overhead cover. Some weapons regarded as inhumane, such as napalm, were used in large quantities.

American restraint in Vietnam was largely motivated by political considerations, and in particular a fear of Chinese and Soviet intervention. Despite this restraint, the few atrocities that were committed by American troops, as well as a perceived lack of clear war goals, helped make the war deeply unpopular at home. Vietnam helped shape the American psyche, contributing to a developing cultural malaise that placed a declining value on heroism and self-sacrifice.[84] It was an important milestone on the path to resurgent ritual and restraint, as the following case studies further illustrate.

Somalia.

The UN conducted a peacekeeping operation in Somalia in 1992, some 20 years after American troops had left Vietnam. The international news media had drawn attention to massive suffering in Somalia, the result of warlordism, with thousands, if not millions, of people starving.[85] The operation soon proved far more deadly than had been anticipated. Warfare is

endemic in Somali history, and it is regarded as an important part of Somali culture.[86] Thus, when peacekeepers arrived, they encountered a militant people, a people that would rather fight than disarm.[87]

Western soldiers in Somalia operated under strict rules of engagement, understandable given the view that the mission was peacekeeping.[88] However, even when the situation deteriorated and seemed to demand a move to peace enforcement, or even full combat, a low-key approach was maintained.[89] Peacekeepers were pushed into a defensive posture by Somali attacks, and for a time did not respond assertively.[90]

Eventually, however, the indecisiveness of the conflict began to incite more aggressive behavior; this was predictable, given the long history of Western imperial and colonial wars.[91] In an attempt to corral a warlord regarded as a key spoiler of peace efforts,[92] elite American troops were pinned down in the center of Mogadishu,[93] attacked by a swarming mass of tribal warriors.[94] Eighteen Americans were killed. In a scene that might have taken place before the walls of Troy 3,000 years before, the corpses were dragged around the streets. Seeming primitivism had triumphed over rational war.

Historically, a Western force would likely have responded to such an event with increasing brutality. This would have been expected in 1945, and perhaps even in 1967. But times had changed. Instead of responding vigorously, the United States decided to withdraw. In a manner that would have been familiar to the Nguni or Yanomamo, the Americans pulled out as soon as the casualties began to arouse public opinion at home against the intervention. The President did not feel that the cost was justified by the likely benefits of the operation. Withdrawal was partly

motivated by negative news media attention,[95] but it must be remembered that it was not the media that made the final decision.[96] In bringing about such an abrupt withdrawal, the primitive Somalis illustrated brilliantly the resurgence of primitive traits within the American warmaking machine: fighting in a restrained manner, indulging in hit-and-run tactics, and fleeing as soon as a few casualties were inflicted.

Kosovo.

Kosovo provides an even finer exemplar of reemergent primitivism, for unlike Somalia, it was ostensibly an enforcement action rather than peacekeeping. The war in Kosovo came about due to a belief that Yugoslav forces were waging a campaign of ethnic cleansing within the borders of Kosovo, a province in Yugoslavia. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) offered to deploy a peacekeeping force in the province; Yugoslavia refused, feeling such was an infringement of its sovereignty. In response, NATO launched Operation ALLIED FORCE.

NATO, which combined the military forces of most of the world's strongest states, could have crushed Yugoslavia in a few days had it fully utilized the arsenals at its disposal, but it did not even send in ground troops. Instead, it embarked on a 78-day aerial bombardment, which was assisted in its aim by the efforts of Russian diplomats.[97] This aerial campaign was heavily restrained. At the heart of this restraint was a perceived popular aversion to casualties, both friendly and enemy.[98] Aircraft were forced to bomb from high altitudes to avoid defensive fire, which severely limited their accuracy and effectiveness; during the entire campaign, NATO aircraft destroyed only 30

armored vehicles and 20 artillery pieces.[99] Offensively, effective assets such as the AH-64 *Apache* attack helicopter, which might have been vulnerable to defensive fire, were not used.[100] Overall, this tentative use of aerial stand-off weapons, all the while protected by a massive electronic shield, was strongly reminiscent—albeit in a high-technology manner—of primitive warfare, particularly that of the Maring.

There were still criticisms of the perceived "inhumane" nature of some activities undertaken by NATO.[101] Operation ALLIED FORCE did target some civilian facilities, including power and sewage facilities. However, immense care was taken to ensure that any targets struck caused minimum civilian casualties.[102] Micromanagement similar to that which emerged in Vietnam recurred, although now it was further complicated by the multinational nature of the committees determining which targets could be struck.[103] Yet there was also a paradox, in that efforts to avoid friendly casualties, such as high-altitude attacks, were the cause on some occasions of civilian casualties, such as the bombing of a refugee convoy.

From the beginning, there was great hesitation about deploying ground troops due to concern about potential casualties. However, as the air campaign dragged on seemingly without effect on the Milosevic government, some efforts were made to prepare for a ground offensive.[104] The United Kingdom (UK) offered to commit 50,000 British troops, and Germany, Italy, and even France seemed increasingly open to the prospect. However, the fact that a ground invasion did not take place within the first 78 days, and indeed was unlikely to have happened within the first 6 months of the campaign, indicates how much of a last resort such a move was seen. NATO was extremely

unwilling to resort to unrestrained measures, and the mere possibility of a ground invasion should not be seen as indicating anything to the contrary. Indeed, the true likelihood of a ground campaign needs to be closely evaluated, given NATO's unwillingness to engage in more-restricted escalations, such as an intensification of the air campaign.

Other elements typical of primitive war were also present in Operation ALLIED FORCE. The operation was preceded by a lengthy and complex diplomatic process, which continued in Byzantine fashion throughout the bombing. There were constant concerns about treachery within the Alliance, including the possibility that countries within NATO were feeding information to the Yugoslavs.

In the end, NATO sustained zero casualties during Operation ALLIED FORCE.[105] It managed to insert a peacekeeping force in the province, as had been its goal all along. Yet some commentators have claimed that the restrained methods utilized by the Alliance, reminiscent of primitive war, caused this goal to be substantially delayed.[106]

Afghanistan.

On September 11, 2001 (9/11), al Qa'eda terrorists crashed airliners into the World Trade Center in New York and Pentagon in Washington, DC. The American reprisal, assisted by several allies, was swift. Al Qa'eda's leadership was tracked to Afghanistan. When the Taliban government of that country refused assistance in capturing those al Qa'eda leaders, America, leading a coalition of the willing, invaded Afghanistan. Given the history of conflicts involving the West against non-West, as well as the fact that

American soil had been attacked, one might have expected a brutal war.

Afghanistan, like Somalia, has a culture in which war is endemic. For much of its history, Afghan warfare was limited in time, space, and degree;[107] as such, it was an exemplar of primitive warfare. When first the British, and later the Russians, invaded, however, this traditional code was broken. The Afghans began to fight in increasingly brutal fashion.[108] As in Somalia, the invading Americans encountered a militant culture.[109]

Since 2001, Afghan insurgents have fought in a savage fashion, targeting civilians and in some ways trying to turn their *jihad,* or holy war, into a total commitment.[110] Their use of terrorist tactics has contributed to a developing perception that such is the contemporary Arab/Muslim way of war.[111] This is no true Clausewitzian war, although it is cruel. Violence for the *mujahedin* is ritualized, expressive, and focused on blood.[112]

America, unlike the Afghan insurgents, has the means to wage total war. Yet its operations against the Taliban have been heavily restrained. At first, it sent in only a few small elite units, usually consisting of Special Forces.[113] These worked closely with local actors, "buying out" the allegiance of Afghan warlords,[114] and relying on the flexible loyalties of many actors in a way that would have been very familiar to a feudal baron of the Middle Ages. A series of surgical strikes was undertaken, often using airpower as well, to eliminate the al Qa'eda and Taliban leadership.

Since the initial invasion, much of Afghanistan has been occupied by a Western coalition.[115] Despite oscillating levels of insurgent activity, Western forces have engaged in a ritualized and restrained style of warfare

that again is reminiscent of primitive warfare in many respects.

The theater is a particularly benign one if measured by casualty rates. In approximately the first 5 years, British troops sustained only 16 killed in action, as well as an additional 21 deaths due to accidents or illness.[116] From the start of 2006 to almost the end of 2008, 34 British soldiers were killed in action.[117] While some within the media have tried to present such figures as somehow comparable to World War II casualty rates—a ridiculous claim—it is immediately apparent that the chance of being killed in action in Afghanistan is particularly low. The same has been true for the United States, which, for example, lost only 52 soldiers killed in action for the whole of 2004, or roughly one a week.[118] The casualty rate has increased since then, but overall, 7 years of operations in Afghanistan have resulted in fewer casualties than a single bad day in either World War. This is partly a result of the character of operations. Rather than engaging in large-scale operations, Western units largely live in fortified outposts and engage in daily patrols; as such, operations are reminiscent of extremely dangerous police work, albeit employing much heavier equipment.

Restraint is particularly apparent in the strict rules of engagement applying to the forces in theater. The Germans, for example, have a strict principle of proportionality, allowing the use of lethal force only when an attack is taking place or is imminent.[119] Again, such an approach is more reminiscent of police work than warfare. From at least 2005, the United States expressed some concerns about the rules of engagement followed by various countries in the coalition, noting they could prove counterproductive in more dangerous areas.[120] These rules have heavily restricted the use

of firepower, limiting civilian casualties: approximately 500 Afghans died in 2006, and 1600 in 2007, a very low rate in the historical context.[121] Despite this low rate, in the past year, there have been further moves to tighten the rules further to restrict the likelihood of collateral damage.[122]

Civilians are never deliberately targeted, and are regarded as inviolate, although as the figures above show, accidents do occur. Soldiers are required to be respectful of the local culture as well, even though many of the locals respond with hatred. And yet, despite the degree of restraint apparent in Western behavior, Afghanistan remains perceived as a particularly dangerous place, one in which the West is fighting brutally. Afghan President Hamid Karzai, playing to local political pressure, has criticized the coalition for accidental civilian deaths, perhaps ignorant of the degree of civilian casualties that was usual for most wars during the 20th century.[123] When mistakes are made—a few soldiers stranded without air support, or a few Afghans killed by a misguided bomb—the media response is astonishing. War, to them, should be as it was many thousands of years ago: a ritualized game where none need die.

Iraq.

After the first Gulf War, Iraq proved a constant problem in the Middle East, largely due to its perceived weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program and support for terrorists. A series of limited air strikes, such as Operation DESERT FOX, was undertaken by the United States in an effort to modify Iraq's behavior.[124] These failed, and in the aftermath of 9/11, Iraq was regarded as an even greater threat

due to the possibility of it providing WMD to terrorist organizations. The situation continued to deteriorate until early 2003. Following a series of ritualistic diplomatic maneuvers in the UN, including showboating statements from both the American and Iraqi governments, an American-led coalition invaded Iraq. This steady escalation, from feuding to raiding and finally to battle, was reminiscent of the three-stage combat undertaken by many primitive groups.

The initial conventional campaign went brilliantly.[125] Up to 8 percent of the overall Allied force consisted of special forces, who proved highly adept at pinning down Iraqi units.[126] The armored columns sliced through all opposition, soon reaching and seizing Baghdad. Airpower was employed in a calculated manner, with no attempt to flatten cities or destroy infrastructure. Strict rules of engagement were followed, and civilians were carefully protected; the invasion force moved like a band of explorers navigating the countryside with minimum disturbance to the locals. Only 154 American casualties were incurred during this phase.[127]

Since that conventional campaign, an insurgency—indeed, something more than an insurgency[128]—developed in Iraq, partly due to the restrained and undermanned style in which America waged the conventional phase.[129] Ralph Peters put it aptly, declaring that "we tried to make war on the cheap, only to make the endeavor vastly more expensive—in every respect—than it needed to be."[130]

Many Iraqis saw foreign intervention as a massive insult to their collective honor, and in turn responded violently.[131] As with the Somalis and Afghans, warfare has been endemic in Iraqi culture for many centuries;[132] it has often been seen as a natural element

of life.[133] Again, as in Somalia and Afghanistan, dislocations of traditional structures of society, and the effects of those dislocations on culture often caused by external intervention, have had the effect of increasing the brutality of traditional styles of war.[134] The Iraqi insurgency lacks the heavy weapons available to insurgents in other wars.[135] However, what it has lacked in tanks and aircraft, it has made up for in lethal improvised explosive devices and a tendency to target civilians rather than military personnel.

Despite the brutality of its foes, the Western coalition in Iraq has continued to restrain its methods. As in Afghanistan, war in Iraq resembles extreme policing.[136] Crime has been perceived as the greatest threat to security.[137] Indeed, many U.S. Marines sent to the theater have been trained by the Los Angeles, CA, Police Department in an effort to teach them necessary civil-policing skills.[138]

There are relatively few Allied troops, given the size of the country. The most common activity is the patrol from a fortified outpost. Operations are usually carried out by small units, with the battalion the largest formation.[139] Where there have been larger operations, such as the first battle of Fallujah in April 2004, they have not been carried through to a decisive conclusion.[140]

As in Afghanistan, restraint is further evident in restrictive rules of engagement and low casualty rates on both sides. During a major operation involving seven battalions at the end of 2005, not a single death was sustained on either side, despite the capture of 377 suspected insurgents.[141] During one phase of the Fallujah battle, civilians were allowed to leave the war zone before Western forces attacked. In almost 6 years, the United States has sustained just over 4,200 deaths

in theater; this works out to be roughly two a day, a very low rate compared with past wars.[142] Even during the worst periods, the death rate was still less than five a day across the entire theater.[143] Recently, the death rate has dropped to as low as four a month.[144] In almost 2 1/2 years from the start of 2006, the UK sustained just two killed in action.[145] Casualties on the Iraqi side have also been remarkably low.[146]

Despite fighting a frustrating, culturally confusing conflict—a mixture that in the past has led to massacres—Western troops in Iraq have committed an extraordinarily low number of criminal acts.[147] And such acts that have been committed have been heavily publicized and punished. Yet, as with Afghanistan, public opinion continues to demonize Western forces in Iraq, expecting them to wage immaculate war, which is, of course, an oxymoronic impossibility.

Lebanon 2006.

In 2006, tired of constant provocations by the terrorist group Hezbollah, based largely in Lebanon, Israel took military action. This was not the first time such provocation had occurred; in 1982, Israel used tanks and heavy artillery to flatten resistance, which included Syrian forces. Israel's technique changed in 2006.

As with NATO in Kosovo, at first the Israelis relied almost entirely on air power, reflecting their continuing refusal to countenance even minimal casualties.[148] This tentativeness was also perceived by some as an Israeli refusal to fight "seriously."[149] Only after it had become apparent that airpower by itself would be insufficient did the Israelis move to a ground campaign, using special forces at first in seek-and-destroy mis-

sions, and then escalating to a more general offensive posture.[150]

Despite the fact that their homeland was under fire, the Israelis took great care to fight in a restrained manner that minimized civilian casualties. They demanded accurate intelligence before launching strikes, and refused to engage in such damaging activities as large-scale artillery barrages—preferring more surgical attacks.[151] Despite this, as much as 15 percent of the Lebanese population was internally displaced during the war,[152] as much a result of the constrained size of the theater as any particularly aggressive Israeli behavior.

Hezbollah, on the other hand, proved far less restrained. It launched random rocket attacks against Israeli towns and took hostages. Its combatants were more willing to die, its tactics more creative, and its methods more brutal. It often co-located its combatants with civilians,[153] thus confronting the Israeli forces with the dilemma of whether to inflict civilian casualties or allow enemy forces to survive. Relying on traditional, perhaps primitive, ties of culture, religion, and society,[154] Hezbollah fought a disciplined defense. Eventually, it fought the technologically advanced Israel Defense Forces to a standstill. As in Somalia, supposed primitivism had triumphed; again, however, it had triumphed because of the reemergent primitivism apparent in the methods of the force perceived as more Clausewitzian. Primitivism had not beaten instrumentalism: a more brutal primitivism had beaten a less brutal type.

THE RETURN OF RESTRAINT

Since Vietnam, and especially since the end of the Cold War, the West has fought its wars in an increasingly restrained fashion,[155] deviating from the previous historical trend toward increased totality in war. In many ways, the recent behavior of the West displays elements strongly reminiscent of primitive warfare.[156] There has been little or no use of massive firepower, nor any attempt to undertake strategies of annihilation.[157] Casualties, both friendly and enemy, have been strenuously avoided. Wars have been justified through careful appeals to abstract concepts such as humanitarianism, as well as the concrete manifestations of those concepts, such as international law. Ritualistic elements, especially those related to justification, such as the seeking of a UN mandate prior to any operation, have become stronger. Civilians have been carefully protected, and processes of conciliation, arbitration, and peacemaking have been carried out simultaneously with military operations. At the same time, certain elements of primitive war have not reemerged, such as its endemic nature, its emphasis on combat as a rite of passage to manhood and identity, and its lack of coordination between combatants.

This trend toward restrained war is not reflected in the military behavior of non-Western peoples across the globe.[158] These combatants are often motivated by religion, although tribal ties or simple greed may also be important. They have few, if any, rational political goals as Clausewitz might perceive them.[159] Custom and culture drive them to battle, as it drove their ancestors and their ancestors before them.[160] They fight in an increasingly brutal fashion, and it is here that they have largely broken from the restraints of primitive

warfare. The West is partly to blame here, for it was Western involvement in the region that crippled and mutated traditional martial cultures, imbuing them with the bloodthirsty ideologies they have today.

We may thus be seeing an evolving and ahistorical divergence in global military culture.[161] The West may be retreating toward restraint in warfare, whereas non-Western actors may be charging headlong toward unrestrained methods.[162] Again, it must be emphasized that this is not a value judgment. It may well be that restrained methods of war, reminiscent of primitive war, are actually superior, at least from a moral perspective, to the unrestrained methods supported by a selective reading of Clausewitz; at least one renowned military historian—John Keegan—believes so.[163]

COUNTERFACTUALS OF TOTAL WAR

Counterfactual history does not have a good name, but it is particularly useful here. It is often difficult for us to imagine that past events might have happened differently; once they have occurred, they seem entirely logical, natural, and even inevitable, and we forget that they developed as only one of myriad potential options. As such, counterfactual history can be used to indicate how some of these recent conflicts might have unfolded had the West not returned to a ritualized and restrained way of war, but rather continued the trend toward totality exemplified by the World Wars. There is no intent to suggest that the counterfactuals described would have been better methods of fighting the wars mentioned.[164] But we can devise better policy to the extent that we can reliably compare outcomes of rival courses of action.

In Vietnam, America might have unleashed almost the full power of its arsenal. Massive conventional forces might have landed in the north. Airpower might have been liberated from restrictive rules of engagement, allowing it to destroy almost anything that moved that was not regarded as friendly. An airtight blockade might have been imposed along the entire North Vietnamese coast. Strong censorship might have countered the anti-war movement, allowing the pursuit of rational national war aims.

In Somalia, America might have responded to the "Blackhawk down" incident with a massive escalation of force. Mogadishu might have been flattened, and the insurgent groups destroyed, regardless of collateral damage. In Kosovo, NATO might have quickly flooded the battlefield with armor from both north and south, accepting the risk of heavy casualties from anti-tank defenses in order to achieve a decisive victory and thus end perceived ethnic cleansing.

In Lebanon, Israel might have preceded a massive tank assault with a murderous artillery barrage reminiscent of the Somme, aiming to dig Hezbollah out of its holes with high explosives. In Afghanistan, a furious America might have dispatched a much larger invasion force to secure the border with Pakistan and then engage in sweep-and-destroy missions reminiscent of the Boer War, turning the mountains of Afghanistan into a depopulated wasteland. Finally, in Iraq, a much larger multinational force might have advanced more carefully, occupying and securing important cities with large garrisons, pacifying as it went. Once Saddam Hussein was defeated, the country might have been quartered in a manner reminiscent of Germany after World War II. A large occupation force would then have been maintained, one authorized to kill as many locals as required to ensure security and stability.

There are three broad factors shaping the contemporary Western way of warfare, driving it toward ritual and restraint.[165] The first relates to the existence, or lack thereof, of a manifest threat to our existence and related debate over the utility of warfare. The second involves the interrelationship between contemporary culture, the news media, and democracy. The third is the increasing professionalism of Western military personnel. The complex relationship between these factors cannot, unfortunately, be fully examined in a monograph of this brevity.

EXISTENTIAL THREATS AND THE UTILITY OF WAR

During the Cold War, restraint in war was eminently understandable from a rational political perspective for one key reason: nuclear weapons.[166] Nuclear weapons, due to their destructive potential, were perceived as having unleashed a "wholly new and hitherto unbelievable dimension of horror."[167] They changed the relationship between destructive power and the capacity to recover to such an extent that any damage inflicted by a nuclear war would take much longer to repair than any political actor could choose to wait.[168] As such, it would be illogical to use nuclear weapons, as their use would be counterproductive.[169] Fear of nuclear escalation led to limited, restrained war: in Vietnam, we felt compelled to tolerate North Vietnamese sanctuaries; in Afghanistan, the Russians took care never to extend the conflict beyond Afghanistan's borders.[170]

With the end of the Cold War, the threat of nuclear war began to diminish. It might have been hypothesized that in the absence of a threat to our existence,

war would become increasingly unlimited; however, it would also need to be remembered that the aftermath of major wars is often notable for efforts to restrict further conflict. The evidence in this case seems to indicate a complex interrelationship between the end of the Cold War and the perceived utility of war.

This analysis began with a quotation from John Lynn discussing the interaction between a society's ideal conception of war—its Perfected Reality—and the actual war.[171] The stronger a part of society is, the more it can dominate the "physical discourse" on war, and the closer will be the resulting relationship between its ideal of war and the actuality of war.

With the end of the Cold War, no Western society faces a serious military threat, and as such the West is militarily hegemonic. Terrorism, which justified the West's intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq, appears incredibly deadly when compared to the relative peace into which terrorism has reemerged,[172] but pales into insignificance when compared to the destructive potentials inherent in the Cold War, the World Wars, or the threat of the Ottomans. The nature of military operations carried out by the West since the end of the Cold War—peace operations, humanitarian interventions, and counterinsurgencies—is strong evidence for our military hegemony, for they are all wars of choice.

In the absence of a serious military threat, questions about the utility of a war—its cost-benefit ratio, both in terms of money and of lives—become absolutely central.[173] Modern warfare, due largely to hyperinflation in equipment costs, has become so expensive that it seldom makes economic sense.[174] Whereas in the past a quick raid or a colonial expedition could seize substantial compensatory booty, that is no longer the case today. And because there are few serious threats

to state security, the motivation of self-preservation is also reduced. As such, war is regarded as a less useful tool of policy than it once was, and fewer resources are allocated to it.

Decisionmakers have thus tried to make "war on the cheap."[175] They have been seduced by the promises of technology, often promoted as the key to rapid, low-cost success.[176] This has led to a belief that technology, if sufficiently advanced, is a substitute for quantity, leading to calls for small, elite forces that can supposedly carry out missions that previously required much larger forces; this belief was behind the major mistake made in Iraq. In some cases, a skewed attitude has developed—as in Kosovo—that a war is a victory merely because the costs of the war, both in blood and treasure, are low, even if the benefits are infinitesimal.[177] This concept of a victory without casualties has become very appealing to Western democracies with narrow self-interest.[178]

However, cost and lack of utility are not sufficient conditions for restrained war. After all, one could fight with limited means but in a brutal fashion; moreover, few wars are cheaper than a single nuclear strike. The key is the interaction between the declining utility of war and cultural beliefs.

Culture, Media, and Democracy.

Giving shape to the West's Perfected Reality of war—which, as noted, is possible because of the hegemonic power of the West—is a combination of cultural attitudes on morality, especially humanitarianism; the influence of the media; and the power of democracy.

Western cultures, far more than their non-Western counterparts, are constantly in a state of flux. Given

this, it is not surprising that Western cultures have recently attempted to remake their style of warfare in what is felt to be the culturally correct form. Freed of the need to ensure its own survival, the West has decided to fight in a self-righteous manner, i.e., with one hand tied behind its back.[179] This has had a strong effect on both its justifications for, and conduct in, war. There have been strong drives to rehumanize warfare, to make it more consistent with perceived widespread moral beliefs including the sanctity of life and respect for international law.[180] This is particularly the case with the Global War on Terror. Because this war has been presented to the public in a way that makes it seem as much about Western values as about military success, it has constrained the methods regarded as acceptable.[181]

The nature of democracies forces leaders to be cognizant of public attitudes toward warfare, which in turn affects the means utilized.[182] There is usually a lack of military experience among democratic politicians and, accordingly, they are especially prone to persuasive sophistry. Sophistical public attitudes are given further impetus by the news media, which, given their own liberal bias, demand strongly humanitarian behavior by military personnel.[183] The end result of these attitudes is a democracy-induced "restrained fighting calculus," a way of war that attempts to balance cultural demands, military efficacy, and political requirements, but which seldom results in particularly effective military operations.[184] Indeed, this calculus often increases the duration of wars, increases casualties, and causes costs to skyrocket.[185]

Contemporary humanitarian attitudes are complex, but can be roughly compressed to two main issues: what happens to our soldiers, and what is done

to the forces of the enemy and his civilians. Western societies today impose high standards on how their forces treat their enemies, in stark contrast to the historical Western tradition of seeing its non-Western foes as barbarous.[186] In those military operations where the West is perceived to have an unfair advantage, there is additional pressure for it to take the moral high ground and avoid the use of all the capabilities available to it.[187] Three of the most militarily active states—the United States, the UK, and Israel—all take great pains to avoid inflicting civilian casualties.[188] They also make it clear that they do not perceive it to be moral to punish a civilian population for the actions of its leaders.[189]

An entirely natural belief that friendly deaths should be avoided has been given additional strength by the perceived lack of utility in contemporary warfare. [190] Because of this, risk aversion has become central to contemporary Western ways of war.[191] Western governments seem relatively willing to send soldiers to war, but extremely unwilling to have those soldiers die.[192]

This latent pacifism is intensified by the technology that,[193] as noted earlier, has deluded leaders into thinking war can be cheap;[194] it has also deluded them into thinking that war can be immaculate, surgical, and nonlethal.[195] Precision munitions are now shaping the types of operations undertaken in a range of conflicts. The accuracy of these weapons has become the controlling factor, with strikes often disallowed unless they can meet some gold standard of accuracy. When munitions go wrong, as they are wont to do due to the friction of war, there is seldom an honest appreciation of the inevitable limitations. A single laser-guided bomb hitting a civilian warehouse is seen as a major

catastrophe, showing the media's ignorance of the enormous latent potentialities present in the arsenals of every Western military if they truly chose to fight in a brutal fashion.[196]

A further cultural element is oscillation in support for the military.[197] In the West, attitudes toward the military have changed dramatically since Vietnam, especially in America; it was a war that delegitimized much of military endeavor.[198] Contemporary America, and by extension Western culture, is far more inclined to honor the dead but benevolent hero over the live but death-dealing hero.[199] The military heroes of today are not those who storm machinegun nests and slaughter entire platoons of Taliban, but rather those who save others under fire.[200]

Public attitudes toward the military have been shaped by the increasing isolation of the military from broader society. Without conscription, militaries are small professional bodies; accordingly, a much smaller percentage of any Western population has experience of military life. Furthermore, the way in which many soldiers are now isolated from risk[201] and can communicate from their theater across the world further contributes to a perception of soldiering as "just another job," rather than a profession that traffics in death and danger. Peoples do not understand the Clausewitzian friction of war, and consequently they demand that war be carried out in a way that is unrealistic.

Professionalism.

The final factor contributing to resurgent primitivism in warfare is the increasing professionalism of Western military personnel. The influences above are important, but they are not deterministic "forces

of nature." It does not matter how a president, prime minister, or general decides to fight, or that he decides to fight in that way due to a consideration of cultural beliefs, if the chain of command is not robust enough to ensure that those commands are turned into action at the individual level.[202] The individual soldiers who conduct war are human, and, as such, they are motivated by love, greed, hate, honor, and envy.

Contemporary rules of engagement, for example, require even the lowliest private soldier to have some understanding of the laws of armed conflict, something that was surely not expected amongst the slave-soldier hordes of Xerxes. Historically, increasing professionalism has contributed to restraint in war, as disciplined soldiers are less likely to commit acts of brutality.[203] In recent years, professionalism has continued to improve,[204] partly as an outcome of the development of military technology, but also partly because of demands posed by the increasing complexity in the tactics and strategy of war.[205] There is thus a somewhat circular relationship, in that increasing complexity demands increasing professionalism, which in turn enables even more complex and restrained styles of warfare.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF RITUAL AND RESTRAINT

This monograph has taken the position that the West, turning aside from the progression of history, has returned, at least for now, to a ritualized and restrained method of warfare, albeit for very different reasons than those that motivated primitive tribes to behave in such a manner. What does this mean for the West?

A positive implication is the possibility that Western military behavior will affect the behavior of other military cultures. This may then lead to humanitarian, restrained warfare becoming the norm. It will likely have positive effects for humanity as a whole, strengthening respect for life and reducing the number of people who die from conflict. However, there are other more ominous implications as well.

One is that that the West will lose an accurate understanding of the nature of war. The longer it continues to fight in a constrained manner, the more normalized that methodology will become. The decisionmaking spectrum available to leaders for future military endeavors will be restricted to those low-danger, low-intensity options favored today.

A further implication of this style of warfare is that future military operations will be driven by public opinion and politics more than by policy. Traditionally, it has been the role of leaders to lead; while they have been cognizant of popular beliefs, they have also understood that there are some elements of national policy that are unpopular, but necessary. In some ways, this is still so in the West; countries are still willing to embark on unpopular expeditions. The problem develops, however, when leaders are "anxious to go to war, but unwilling to fight." Leaders, ignorant of the realities of war, try to limit the political harm flowing from an unpopular operation by heavily restricting the methods used in order to minimize the casualties and costs.

Another implication is the prospect of the West losing the moral high ground through grandiose efforts to keep the moral high ground—paradoxically a self-defeating approach. Treating one's enemy with some respect is wise, for it prevents overconfidence.

However, if the West continues to demand that its forces treat its enemies with extraordinary respect, take maximum care to avoid collateral damage, and even avoid the killing of enemy combatants, the end result may well be an increase in the public cachet of the enemy. Expectations determine perceptions.

The final implications relate to military effectiveness. First, there is the question of whether or not ritualized and restrained methods of conflict are actually counterproductive on the battlefield, especially when fighting a foe whose methods are unrestrained. The second is to question whether or not restrained methods have the unintended effect of extending the duration of wars, which in turn increases the overall harm inflicted by the conflict. If this is so, then by trying to limit the brutality of war, the West may make it ultimately even more harmful.

The third element is the potential effect of such a style of warfare on the West's future effectiveness. As noted, ritualized and restrained wars usually last a long time. By maintaining a series of overseas garrisons for the foreseeable future, the West may well weaken itself substantially. Militaries may become so focused on these low-intensity, long-duration operations that their efficacy for other operations will decline.

It pays to consider the Aztecs. At the time of the Flower Wars, the Aztecs were hegemonic in Central America. They could fight in a ritualized way because they had no true rival. When a rival did appear—a rival named Cortes, who fought in an amoral, instrumental, rational, unrestrained, and nonritualized manner—the Aztecs were defeated. Cortes fought to kill. He fought to win.

Is there a Cortes awaiting the West today? Will we, the contemporary Flower Warriors, face a foe who, to be defeated, requires our willingness to kill, be killed, and fight to the bitter end? Is the current style of Western warfare but a mere historical blip, a momentary anomaly that will disappear when the world changes again? History cannot answer that question, but we had better be prepared to answer it ourselves.

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